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DOCTOR STRANGE®
ATTACKED IN HIS OWN HOME, THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS MUST FACE--
THE DEMON IN THE DARK!

# STAN LEE PRESENTS: Dr. STRANGE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™

CHRIS CLAREMONT / WRITER | GENE COLAN & D. HANDS / ARTISTS | J. NOVAK, LETTERER / GAFF, COLORIST | JO DUFFY / EDITOR | JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

THIS IS THE NEW YORK DAILY GLOBE, A PAPER WITH A LONG, PROUD HISTORY--AND THE PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS TO PROVE IT. YET, FOR ALL OF THAT, THE GLOBE HAS NEVER BEEN A PARTICULARLY SUCCESSFUL ENTERPRISE.
I AM DOCTOR STEPHEN STRANGE!
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?!!
ITS NEW MANAGEMENT MEANS TO CHANGE THAT--ANY WAY THEY CAN.
NEW YORK DAILY GLOBE
METRO TODAY'S RACING
TV LISTINGS P.12 THURSDAY
30 CENTS
LARGEST SELLING NEWSPAPER
WIZARD OF THE WEST VILLAGE
POLICE CALL DR. STRANGE ON RITUAL MURDERS
BY RANDY JOHNSON

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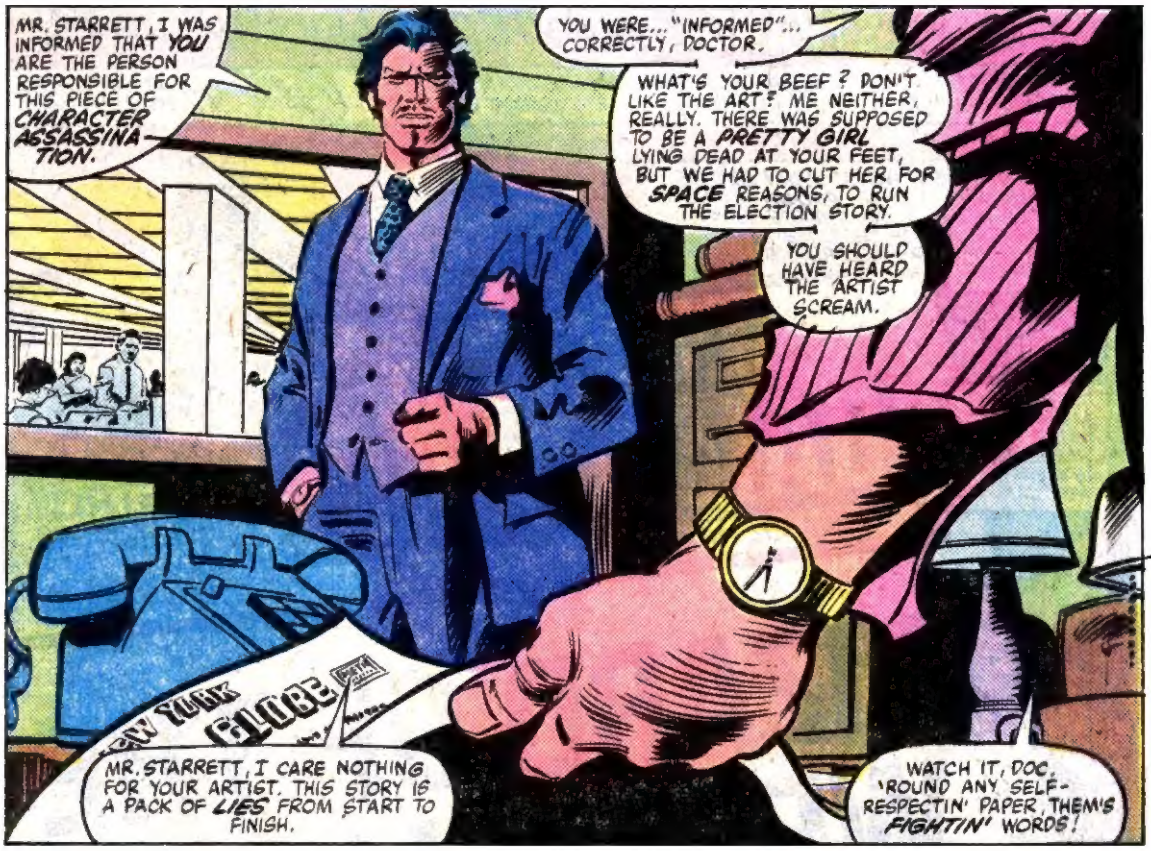
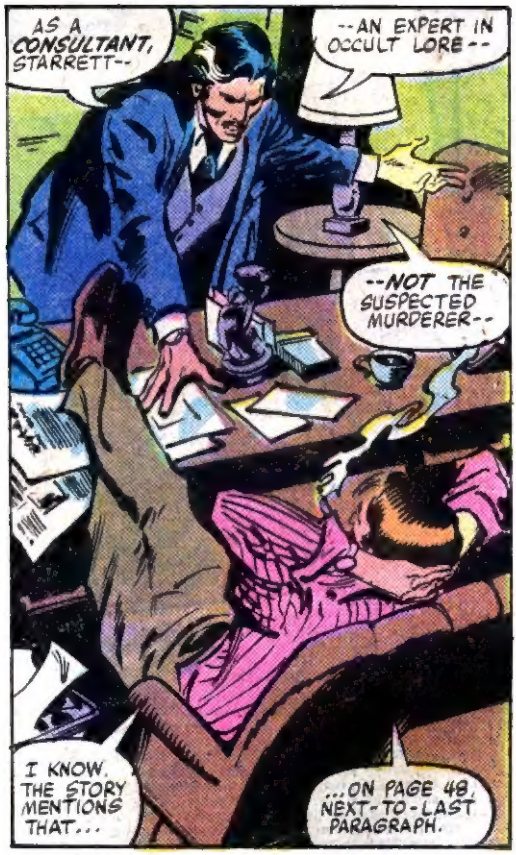
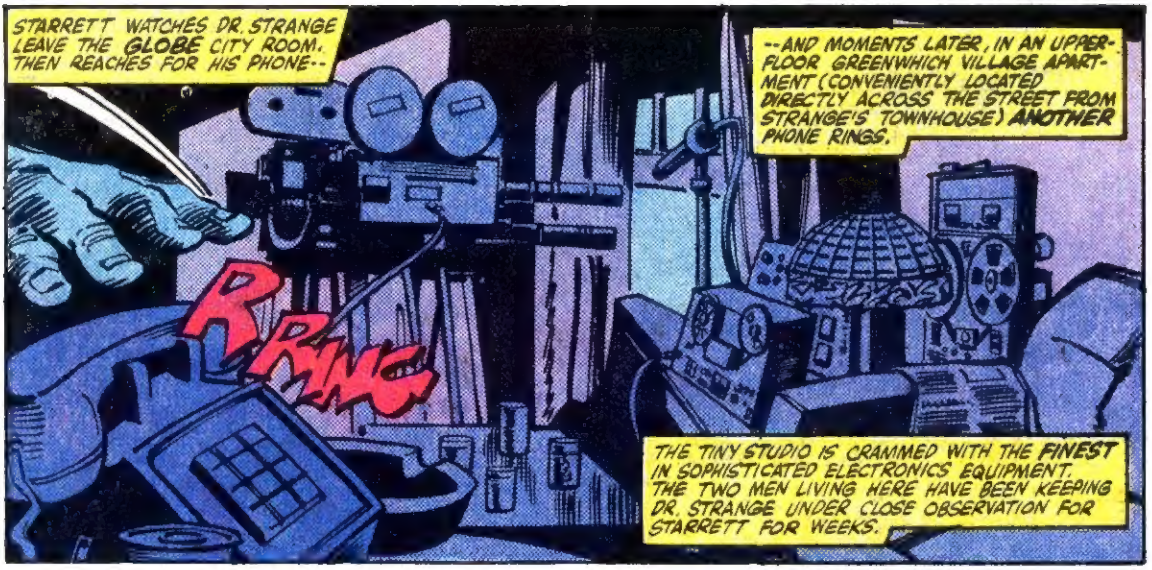

MR. STARRETT, I WAS INFORMED THAT YOU ARE THE PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS PIECE OF CHARACTER ASSASSINATION.
YOU WERE... "INFORMED"... CORRECTLY, DOCTOR.
WHAT'S YOUR BEEF? DON'T LIKE THE ART? ME NEITHER, REALLY. THERE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A PRETTY GIRL LYING DEAD AT YOUR FEET, BUT WE HAD TO CUT HER FOR SPACE REASONS, TO RUN THE ELECTION STORY.
YOU SHOULD HAVE HEARD THE ARTIST SCREAM.
NEW YORK GLOBE
MR. STARRETT, I CARE NOTHING FOR YOUR ARTIST. THIS STORY IS A PACK OF LIES FROM START TO FINISH.
WATCH IT, DOC, 'ROUND ANY SELF-RESPECTIN' PAPER, THEM'S FIGHTIN' WORDS!

THEN MY USE OF THEM SHOULDN'T BOTHER YOU, OR YOUR PAPER.
SCORE ONE FOR YOU. THAT ZINGER WASN'T HALF-BAD.
ANY OTHER GRIPES? 'CAUSE YOU'RE WRONG, Y'KNOW. EVERY WORD IN THAT PIECE IS TRUE. THE GLOBE WILL STAND BY ITS STORY.
AFTER ALL, THE FUZZ DID QUESTION YOU, DIDN'T THEY? AT GREAT LENGTH?


AS A CONSULTANT, STARRETT--
--AN EXPERT IN OCCULT LORE--
--NOT THE SUSPECTED MURDERER--
I KNOW. THE STORY MENTIONS THAT...
...ON PAGE 48, NEXT-TO-LAST PARAGRAPH.

YOU'RE FIGHTIN' A HOPELESS BATTLE WITH US, DOC. NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU TRY-- YOU WON'T-- YOU CAN'T-- WIN.
HERE. JOIN ME IN A BELT OF SCOTCH. IT'LL MAKE YOU FEEL BETTER.
NO. THANK YOU.
YOUR PAPER HAS SLANDERED ME, DEFAMED ME, AS MUCH AS ACCUSED ME OF MURDERS I DID NOT COMMIT -- AND YOU SAY THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO ABOUT IT?!
NOT A BLESSED THING.
YOU COULD SUE, OF COURSE. BUT BETTER -- MORE RUTHLESS AND POWERFUL -- PEOPLE THAN YOU HAVE TRIED...
...AND FAILED.
WHY, STARRETT?
I'VE DONE NOTHING TO YOU -- I DON'T EVEN KNOW YOU -- WHY DO YOU WISH TO MAKE MY LIFE A MISERY?
NOTHING PERSONAL, DOC. YOU'RE A MAN OF MYSTERY -- THE RECLUSE WITH A NAUGHTY, SOME MIGHT SAY SHAMEFUL, PAST AND A VERY WEIRD REPUTATION. YOU'RE A CIRCULATION MANAGER'S DREAM.
AND IF YOU THINK TODAY WAS SOMETHING, WAIT'LL YOU SEE TOMORROW'S INSTALLMENT.
THERE WILL BE... MORE?
Y-YES.
A SERIES. THE LIFE AND TIMES OF STEPHEN STRANGE, ALL THERE IS TO KNOW.
WH-WHAT DID HE DO TO ME?! ONE LOOK, AN' I'M SCARED STIFF!
"ALL?" I SOMEHOW DOUBT IT. I CAUTION YOU, MR. STARRETT. MY LIFE HAS MUCH IN COMMON WITH PANDORA'S BOX. IT IS A BOOK BETTER LEFT CLOSED.
OH, YEAH? IS THAT A THREAT, DOC?!
A WARNING. IF I WERE YOU, I WOULD HEED IT.


STARRETT WATCHES DR. STRANGE LEAVE THE GLOBE CITY ROOM. THEN REACHES FOR HIS PHONE--
--AND MOMENTS LATER, IN AN UPPER-FLOOR GREENWHICH VILLAGE APARTMENT (CONVENIENTLY LOCATED DIRECTLY ACROSS THE STREET FROM STRANGE'S TOWNHOUSE) ANOTHER PHONE RINGS.
RRING
THE TINY STUDIO IS CRAMMED WITH THE FINEST IN SOPHISTICATED ELECTRONICS EQUIPMENT. THE TWO MEN LIVING HERE HAVE BEEN KEEPING DR. STRANGE UNDER CLOSE OBSERVATION FOR STARRETT FOR WEEKS.

THIS IS GILLIS, MR. STARRETT.
YOU'VE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT. EVERYTHING'S GOING ACCORDING TO PLAN. NO PROBLEMS.

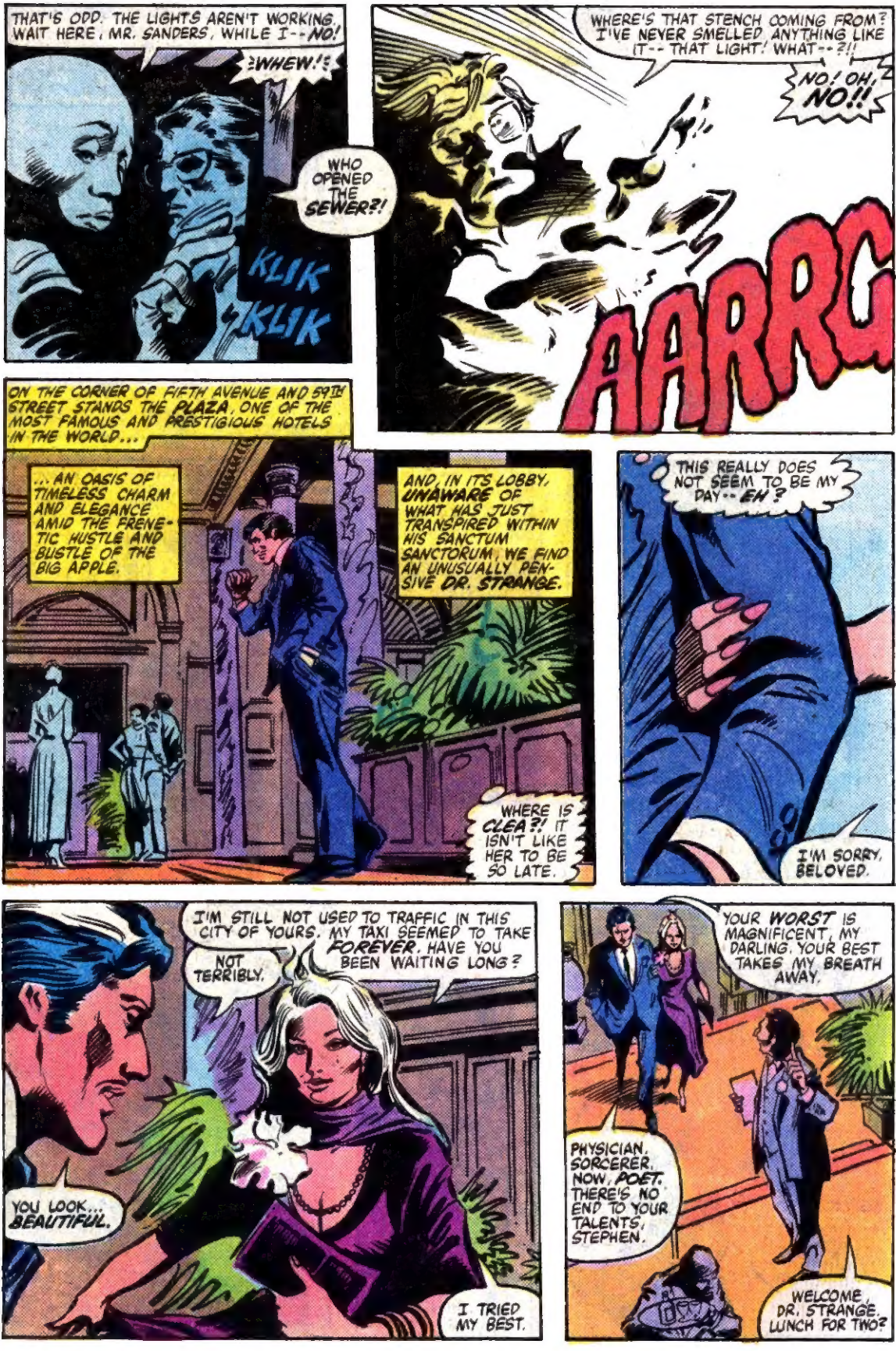
"IN FACT, MY PARTNER, SANDERSON IS MAKING HIS MOVE NOW. WITH ANY LUCK, HE'LL PLANT THE MICROPHONES AND BE OUT OF THERE WITHIN THE HOUR.
AS GILLIS SPEAKS, A DOORBELL CHIMES...

...TO BE ANSWERED BY WONG, FAITHFUL SERVANT AND COMPANION OF THE MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS.
I'M FROM NEW YORK TELEPHONE.

WE GOT REPORTS OF TROUBLE FROM THE PHONES IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD. WE GOTTA CHECK 'EM ALL OUT. ROUTINE.
THIS IS MOST IRREGULAR. OURS SEEM IN PERFECT WORKING ORDER.

HEY, PAL. I GOT MY ORDERS.
VERY WELL THEN. PLEASE FOLLOW ME.

BINGO! I KNEW MY FAKE "MA BELL" I.D. WOULD COME IN HANDY SOMEDAY.
THE MAIN JUNCTION BOX IS IN THE CELLAR.

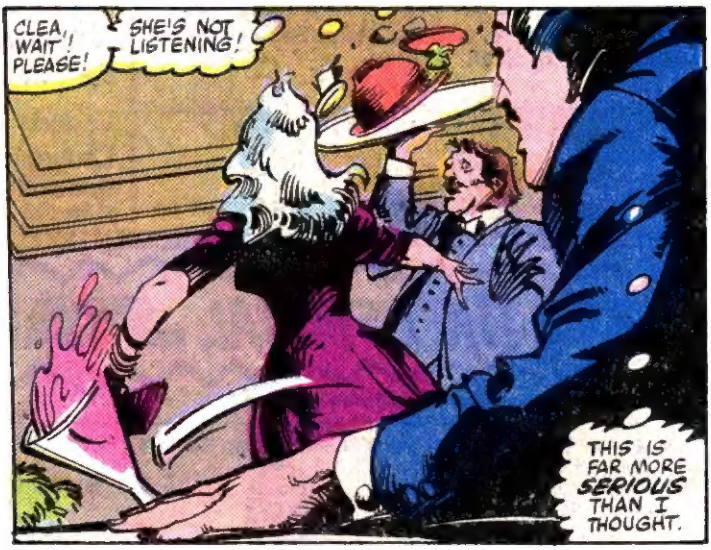

THAT'S ODD. THE LIGHTS AREN'T WORKING. WAIT HERE, MR. SANDERS, WHILE I--NO!
WHEW!
WHO OPENED THE SEWER?!
KLIK KLIK
WHERE'S THAT STENCH COMING FROM? I'VE NEVER SMELLED ANYTHING LIKE IT-- THAT LIGHT! WHAT--?!
NO! OH, NO!!
AARRG
ON THE CORNER OF FIFTH AVENUE AND 59TH STREET STANDS THE PLAZA, ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS AND PRESTIGIOUS HOTELS IN THE WORLD...
...AN OASIS OF TIMELESS CHARM AND ELEGANCE AMID THE FRENETIC HUSTLE AND BUSTLE OF THE BIG APPLE.
AND, IN ITS LOBBY, UNAWARE OF WHAT HAS JUST TRANSPIRED WITHIN HIS SANCTUM SANCTORUM, WE FIND AN UNUSUALLY PENSIVE DR. STRANGE.
WHERE IS CLEA?! IT ISN'T LIKE HER TO BE SO LATE.
THIS REALLY DOES NOT SEEM TO BE MY DAY-- EH?
I'M SORRY, BELOVED.
I'M STILL NOT USED TO TRAFFIC IN THIS CITY OF YOURS. MY TAXI SEEMED TO TAKE FOREVER. HAVE YOU BEEN WAITING LONG?
NOT TERRIBLY.
YOU LOOK... BEAUTIFUL.
I TRIED MY BEST.
YOUR WORST IS MAGNIFICENT, MY DARLING. YOUR BEST TAKES MY BREATH AWAY.
PHYSICIAN, SORCERER, NOW, POET. THERE'S NO END TO YOUR TALENTS, STEPHEN.
WELCOME, DR. STRANGE. LUNCH FOR TWO?

OVER THEIR MEAL, HE TELLS HER OF HIS ON-GOING TRAVAILS WITH THE GLOBE, WHILE SHE TELLS HIM OF HER DAY. A NORMAL, INNOCENT, LOVERS' CONVERSATION...
YET, THERE IS AN UNDERTONE TO CLEA'S WORDS -- PART BITTERNESS, PART ANGER, BUT MOSTLY SORROW --
--THAT STRANGE HAS BEEN HEARING MORE AND MORE OF LATE. TODAY, HE MEANS TO LEARN THE REASON FOR IT.
MEANWHILE, DOWNTOWN...
STARRETT, WE MAY HAVE A COMPLICATION.
"SANDERSON SHOULD HAVE BEEN FINISHED AND OUT OF STRANGE'S HOUSE AGES AGO; BUT HE'S STILL INSIDE.
"AND NOW I'VE SPOTTED SARA WOLFE -- THE BROAD STRANGE HIRED AS HIS SOCIAL SECRETARY.
WONG, IT'S SARA! I'M HOME.
WONG?!
NO ANSWER. BUT WONG SHOULD BE HERE.
HE SAID HE WASN'T GOING TO DO DO THE MARKETING UNTIL I GOT BACK FROM THE BANK.
ALSO, HE SAID HE'D SHOW ME THE HOUSE -- WHERE TO GO, AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY...
...WHERE NOT TO GO.
I CAN'T QUITE PUT MY FINGER ON IT, BUT SOMETHING FEELS VERY WRONG.
BASEMENT DOOR WAS OPEN. MAYBE HE'S DOWN HERE.
KLIK!
GREAT -- THE LIGHT SWITCH DOESN'T WORK.
I'D BETTER GO UPSTAIRS AND WAIT FOR STEPHEN -- HUH?!?
AAAIIII--!!

THE OAK ROOM, AT THE PLAZA...
YOU'VE HARDLY TOUCHED YOUR FOOD, CLEA.
I'M NOT HUNGRY.
IS THAT ALL?
MUST THERE BE MORE?

NO. NO. IT'S JUST THAT...
...SOMETHING SEEMS TO BE TROUBLING YOU. I'D LIKE TO HELP, IF I CAN. IF YOU'LL LET ME.

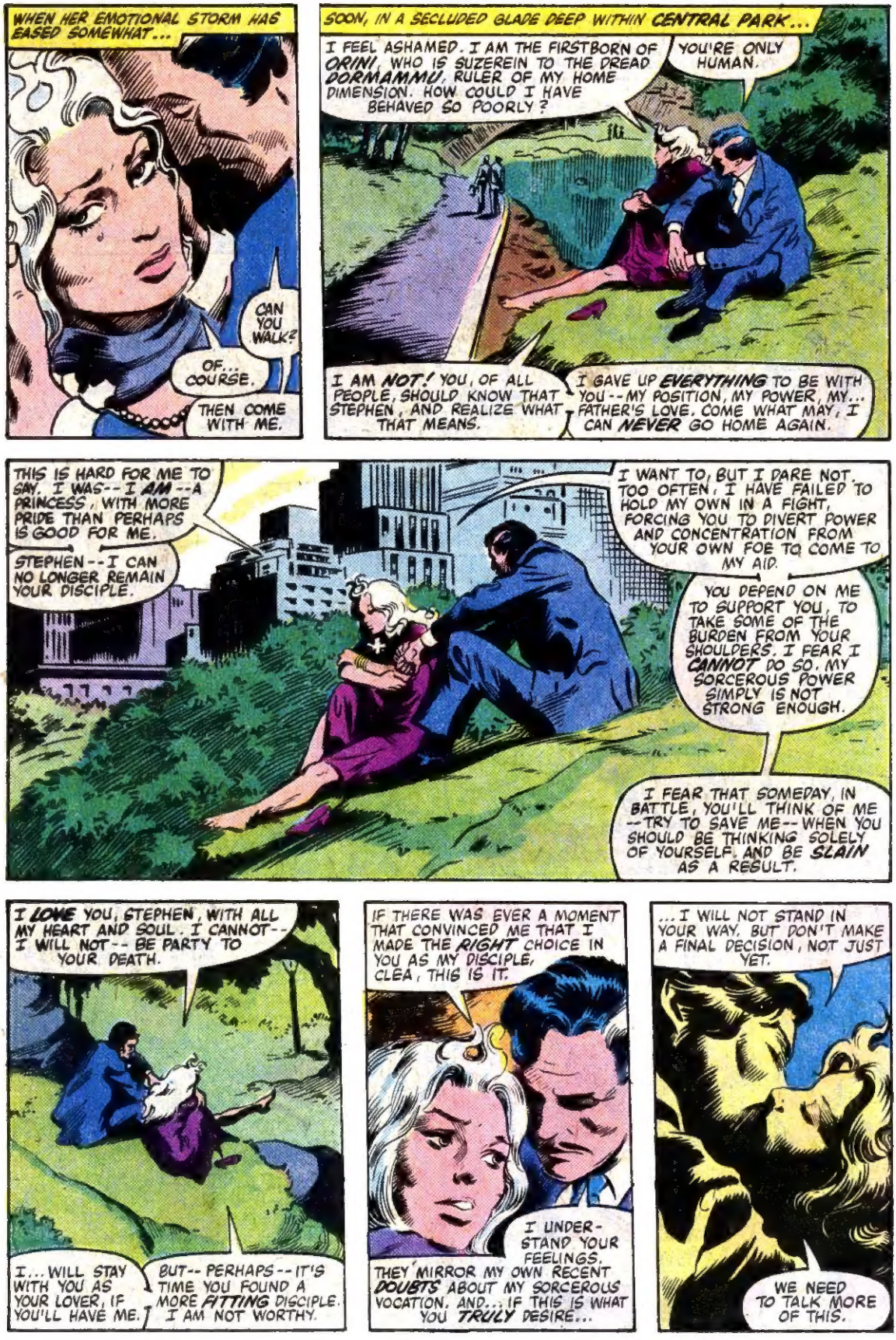
HELP?! BY THE ETERNAL, STEPHEN STRANGE--
--YOU'RE THE CAUSE!!


CLEA, WAIT! PLEASE!
SHE'S NOT LISTENING!
THIS IS FAR MORE SERIOUS THAN I THOUGHT.

IF ONLY I KNEW WHAT WAS TROUBLING HER!
BUT, HARD THOUGH IT MAY BE FOR BOTH OF US, SHE MUST TELL ME OF HER OWN FREE WILL.
ALL EYES ARE ON HER. GOOD.

NO ONE NOTICED THE GOLD COINS I CONJURED ONTO THE TABLE.
THEY SHOULD COVER OUR BILL...
...AND SMOOTH ANY RUFFLED FEATHERS.
EXCUSE ME, PLEASE!
A LOVER'S QUARREL, IN THE PLAZA! HOW DELIGHTFULLY ROMANTIC.

SHE RUNS WITHOUT PURPOSE OR DIRECTION, GOADED ONLY BY A PRIMAL, ANIMAL NEED TO ESCAPE.
AND AS SHE RUNS, IMAGES COLLIDE IN HER MIND: THE REALITY AROUND HER CONTRASTING WITH MEMORIES --BOTH FOND AND FEARFUL --OF THE ALIEN DIMENSION WHERE SHE WAS BORN.
DESPITE HER APPEARANCE, CLEA IS NOT HUMAN, NOT A CHILD OF THE EARTH. AND THOUGH SHE'S LIVED HERE --HAPPILY, FOR THE MOST PART-- FOR SOME TIME, SHE STILL FEELS LIKE AN OUTSIDER.
IN HER WORLDSPACE, THERE ARE NO CARS-- NO VEHICLES OF ANY KIND -- AND RELATIVELY FEW PEOPLE.
:OHH!!:
HONK!
SCRREEE
BUT ON EARTH, HUMANITY -- ITS BUILDINGS, ITS MACHINES -- PRESSES IN CLOSE AROUND HER.
SHE NEVER MINDED BEFORE...
...THOUGH, IN TRUTH, SHE ALMOST ALWAYS FELT UNCOMFORTABLE...
NOW, SUDDENLY, SHE CANNOT STAND THIS PLACE...
...OR WHAT SHE FEELS IT IS DOING TO HER.
CLEA!
S-STEPHEN...!!
SHE TRIES TO TALK, BUT NO WORDS COME -- ONLY HOT TEARS AS SOBS RACK HER SLIM, STRONG FRAME. SHE HOLDS STRANGE AS CLOSE, AS TIGHTLY AS SHE CAN, AND HE RESPONDS IN KIND, COMFORTING HER.

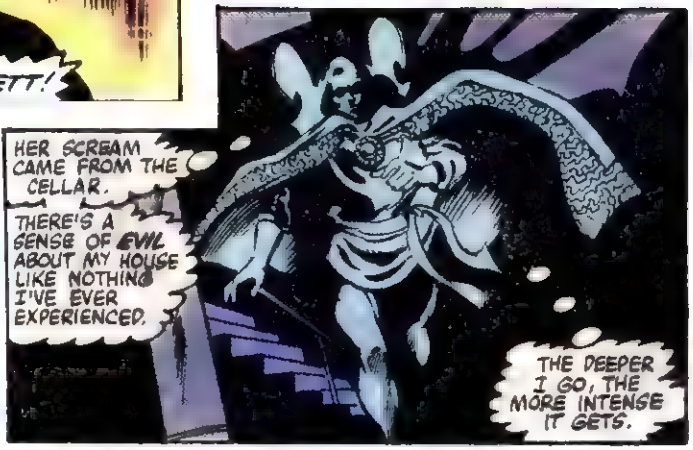

WHEN HER EMOTIONAL STORM HAS EASED SOMEWHAT...
CAN YOU WALK?
OF... COURSE.
THEN COME WITH ME.
SOON, IN A SECLUDED GLADE DEEP WITHIN CENTRAL PARK...
I FEEL ASHAMED. I AM THE FIRSTBORN OF ORINI, WHO IS SUZEREIN TO THE DREAD DORMAMMU, RULER OF MY HOME DIMENSION. HOW COULD I HAVE BEHAVED SO POORLY?
YOU'RE ONLY HUMAN.
I AM NOT! YOU, OF ALL PEOPLE, SHOULD KNOW THAT STEPHEN, AND REALIZE WHAT THAT MEANS.
I GAVE UP EVERYTHING TO BE WITH YOU--MY POSITION, MY POWER, MY... FATHER'S LOVE. COME WHAT MAY, I CAN NEVER GO HOME AGAIN.
THIS IS HARD FOR ME TO SAY. I WAS--I AM--A PRINCESS, WITH MORE PRIDE THAN PERHAPS IS GOOD FOR ME.
STEPHEN--I CAN NO LONGER REMAIN YOUR DISCIPLE.
I WANT TO, BUT I DARE NOT. TOO OFTEN, I HAVE FAILED TO HOLD MY OWN IN A FIGHT, FORCING YOU TO DIVERT POWER AND CONCENTRATION FROM YOUR OWN FOE TO COME TO MY AID.
YOU DEPEND ON ME TO SUPPORT YOU, TO TAKE SOME OF THE BURDEN FROM YOUR SHOULDERS. I FEAR I CANNOT DO SO. MY SORCEROUS POWER SIMPLY IS NOT STRONG ENOUGH.
I FEAR THAT SOMEDAY, IN BATTLE, YOU'LL THINK OF ME--TRY TO SAVE ME--WHEN YOU SHOULD BE THINKING SOLELY OF YOURSELF. AND BE SLAIN AS A RESULT.
I LOVE YOU, STEPHEN, WITH ALL MY HEART AND SOUL. I CANNOT--I WILL NOT--BE PARTY TO YOUR DEATH.
I... WILL STAY WITH YOU AS YOUR LOVER, IF YOU'LL HAVE ME.
BUT--PERHAPS--IT'S TIME YOU FOUND A MORE FITTING DISCIPLE. I AM NOT WORTHY.
IF THERE WAS EVER A MOMENT THAT CONVINCED ME THAT I MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE IN YOU AS MY DISCIPLE, CLEA, THIS IS IT.
I UNDERSTAND YOUR FEELINGS. THEY MIRROR MY OWN RECENT DOUBTS ABOUT MY SORCEROUS VOCATION, AND... IF THIS IS WHAT YOU TRULY DESIRE...
...I WILL NOT STAND IN YOUR WAY. BUT DON'T MAKE A FINAL DECISION, NOT JUST YET.
WE NEED TO TALK MORE OF THIS.

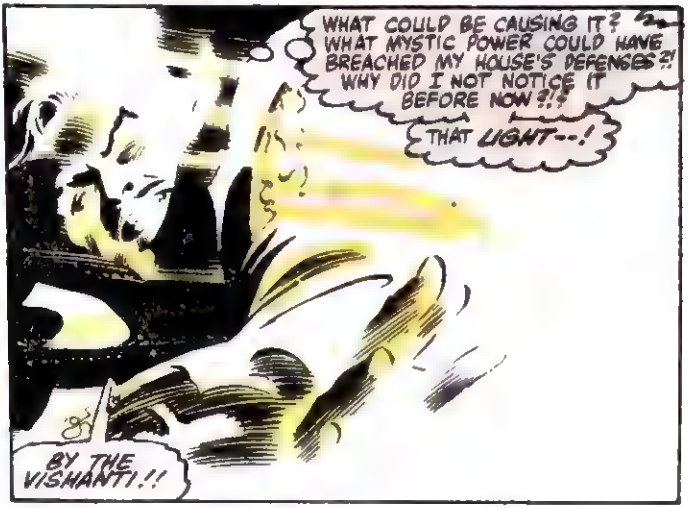
A LONG, LAZY AFTERNOON PASSES...
...AND GREENWICH VILLAGE... WHERE THE MOST OUTLANDISH SPECTACLES ARE VIEWED AS EVERYDAY OCCURENCES -- IS TREATED TO THE SIGHT OF AN ELEGANT HORSE-DRAWN CARRIAGE TURNING DOWN BLEECKER STREET.
AT THE SAME TIME, JUST DOWN THE BLOCK, AT THE FRONT DOOR OF DR. STRANGE'S TOWNHOUSE...
OPEN UP IN THERE, BLAST YOU! OR I'LL CALL THE COPS AND HAVE 'EM BREAK THE DOOR DOWN!
WE'D BETTER CALL THE COPS--
--BEFORE THIS NUT-CAGE HURTS HIMSELF.
YOU CAN'T KEEP ME OUT HERE FOREVER, STRANGE!
I HAVE NO INTENTION OF EVEN TRYING, STARRETT.
:ULP!:
WHAT, PRAY TELL, ARE YOU DOING HERE?
ONE OF MY PEOPLE WENT INTO YOUR HOUSE HOURS AGO, FELLA--
--AND HE HASN'T COME OUT!
I'LL FIND WONG OR SARA, STEPHEN.
PERHAPS THEY CAN EXPLAIN WHAT'S GOING ON.
THIS RUDE LITTLE MAN, I LEAVE TO YOU.
THIS EMPLOYEE OF YOURS, STARRETT. HOW DID HE GAIN ENTRANCE TO MY HOUSE?
HE WAS HERE ON LEGITIMATE BUSINESS
SOMEHOW, I DOUBT THAT--
DEMONS OF DENAK!!
WHAT THE--?!?
EEEAAK
THAT SCREAM-- IT'S CLEA!

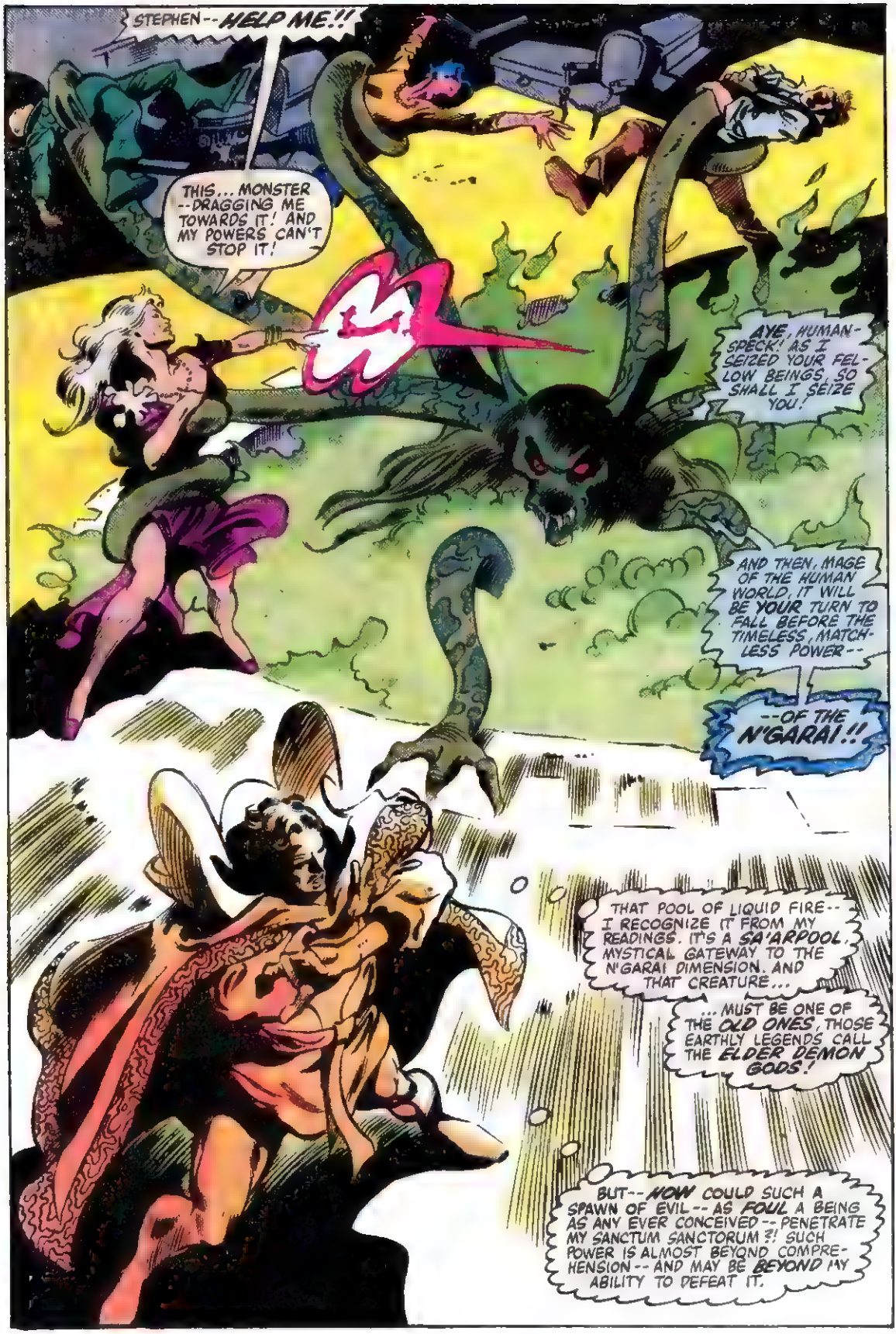
I'VE NEVER HEARD HER SOUND SO FRIGHTENED!
YOUR CLOTHES! THE MINUTE WE STEPPED OVER THE THRESHOLD, THEY CHANGED INTO THAT FANCY COSTUME!
HOW DID YOU DO THAT?!
"WE"?!!
STARRETT!

I HAVE NEITHER THE TIME, THE INCLINATION NOR THE PATIENCE TO DEAL WITH YOU, STARRETT. I ADVISE YOU TO LEAVE--NOW!
TEMPER, TEMPER, DOC.
YOU WANT ME OUT, YOU'LL HAVE TO THROW ME OUT.
STEPHEN
IF I MUST--CLEA!!

IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE, STARRETT--
--IF YOU VALUE YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL--STAY IN THIS FOYER!
SURE THING, DOC. ANYTHING YOU SAY.
NOT A CHANCE, JERKBALL.


HER SCREAM CAME FROM THE CELLAR.
THERE'S A SENSE OF EVIL ABOUT MY HOUSE LIKE NOTHING I'VE EVER EXPERIENCED.
THE DEEPER I GO, THE MORE INTENSE IT GETS.


WHAT COULD BE CAUSING IT? WHAT MYSTIC POWER COULD HAVE BREACHED MY HOUSE'S DEFENSES?! WHY DID I NOT NOTICE IT BEFORE NOW?!?
THAT LIGHT--!
BY THE VISHANTI!!

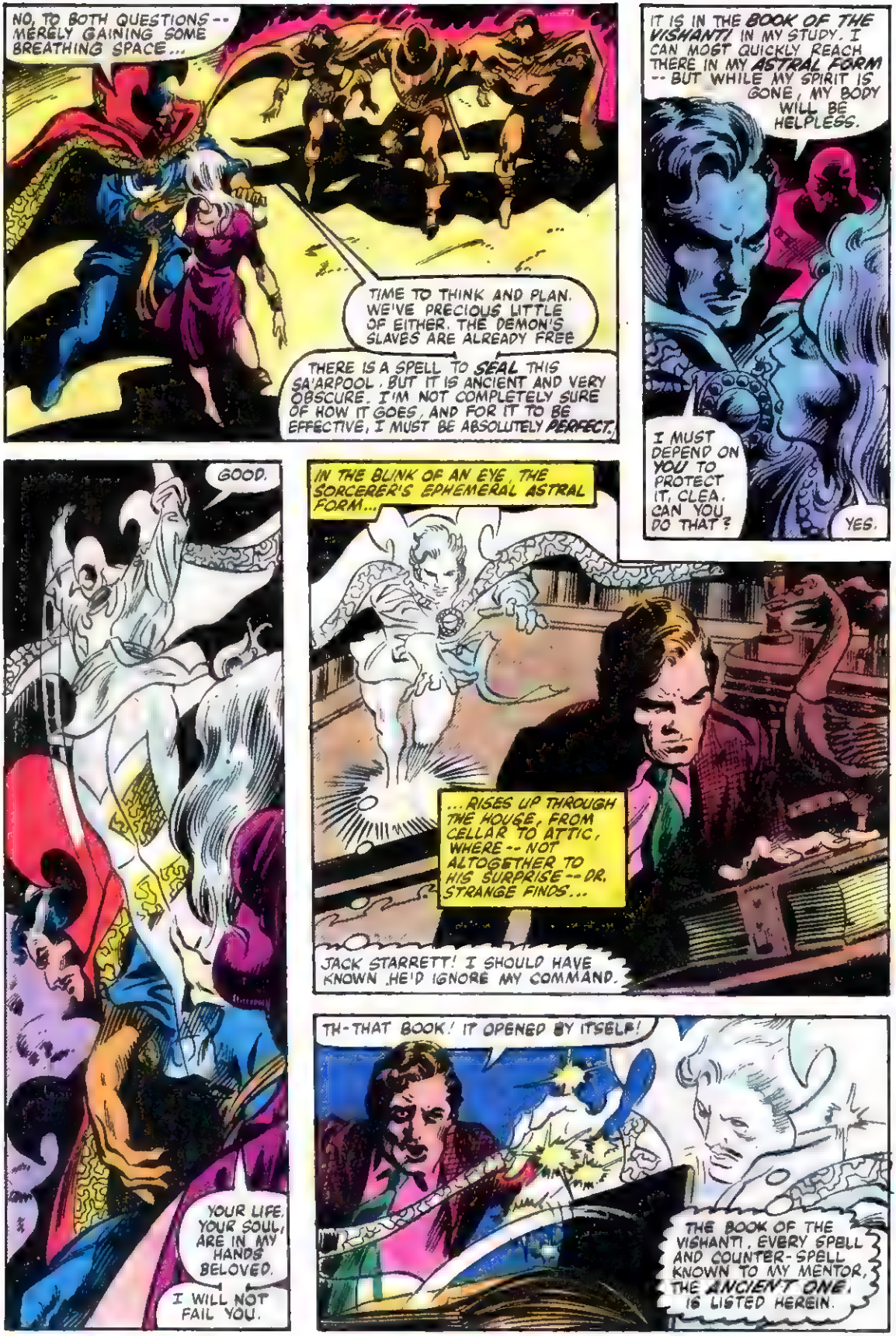

STEPHEN--HELP ME!!
THIS... MONSTER --DRAGGING ME TOWARDS IT! AND MY POWERS CAN'T STOP IT!
AYE, HUMAN-SPECK! AS I SEIZED YOUR FELLOW BEINGS, SO SHALL I SEIZE YOU!
AND THEN, MAGE OF THE HUMAN WORLD, IT WILL BE YOUR TURN TO FALL BEFORE THE TIMELESS, MATCHLESS POWER--
--OF THE N'GARAI!!
THAT POOL OF LIQUID FIRE-- I RECOGNIZE IT FROM MY READINGS. IT'S A SA'ARPOOL, MYSTICAL GATEWAY TO THE N'GARAI DIMENSION. AND THAT CREATURE...
...MUST BE ONE OF THE OLD ONES, THOSE EARTHLY LEGENDS CALL THE ELDER DEMON GODS!
BUT--NOW COULD SUCH A SPAWN OF EVIL-- AS FOUL A BEING AS ANY EVER CONCEIVED-- PENETRATE MY SANCTUM SANCTORUM?! SUCH POWER IS ALMOST BEYOND COMPREHENSION-- AND MAY BE BEYOND MY ABILITY TO DEFEAT IT.

BUT DEFEAT IT I MUST, OR FIVE LIVES WILL BE FORFEIT-- FIVE SOULS FOREVER DAMNED!
I'LL NEED CLEA BY MY SIDE. I MUST FREE HER FIRST.
THE FEARSOME FANGS OF FARALLAH SHOULD DO THE JOB NICELY.
THE DEMON SHRIEKS IN AGONY AND RAGE AS ITS TENTACLE IS SEVERED. THIS FIRST VICTORY GOES TO DR. STRANGE. "AN EASY VICTORY," THINKS THE MAGE.
"TOO EASY!"
IS THERE NO END TO YOUR PERFIDY, SORCERER?! YOU DARED DESTROY OUR SERVANT, SHIALMAR, THE SHADOWQUEEN!* NOW YOU DARE HARM ONE OF THE IMMORTALS!
FOR THAT, YOU WILL SUFFER! BEFORE I AM DONE, YOU WILL BEG FOR THE RELEASE OF DEATH...
*SEE LAST ISH--JO.
...A RELEASE THAT WILL FOREVER BE DENIED!
THE DEMON IS HURLING THE FURNITURE STORED DOWN HERE AT US. FORTUNATELY, THE SHIELD OF THE SERAPHIM IS ABLE TO PROTECT US.
CLEA, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I LIVE, BUT... I'LL NEED A MOMENT... TO REGAIN MY STRENGTH. DEMON'S TOUCH-- SO... HORRIBLE.
I TRIED TO SAVE THE OTHERS, STEPHEN.
AS USUAL, I FAILED!

I NEED YOUR HELP, CLEA. QUICKLY NOW, CONJURE THE FARALLAC FANGS ONCE MORE.
NO, MAGE.
STOP THAT! I DIDN'T RESCUE YOU TO HEAR YOU FEEL SORRY FOR YOURSELF!
THIS ATTACK WORKED ONCE
I WILL NOT PERMIT IT TO SUCCEED A SECOND TIME.
PERHAPS, THEN, A DIRECT ASSAULT ON THE DEMON ITSELF...
...WITH A BOLT OF BEDEVILMENT!
AGAIN, THE N'GARAI CREATURE SCREAMS.
TO ESCAPE THE AGONY CAUSED BY STRANGE'S ATTACK, IT DISAPPEARS BENEATH THE SURFACE OF THE SA'ARPOOL...
...TAKING ITS THREE HELPLESS CAPTIVES WITH IT.
MASTER!!
WONG!!
VISHANTI, FORGIVE ME, WHAT HAVE I DONE?!
YOU DID WHAT I FEARED YOU WOULD. YOU THOUGHT OF ME BEFORE THOSE OTHERS.
I LIVE. BUT THEY HAVE PAYED THE ULTIMATE PRICE. BECAUSE I HAD NOT THE ABILITY -- THE STRENGTH -- TO SAVE EVEN MYSELF, MUCH LESS THEM.

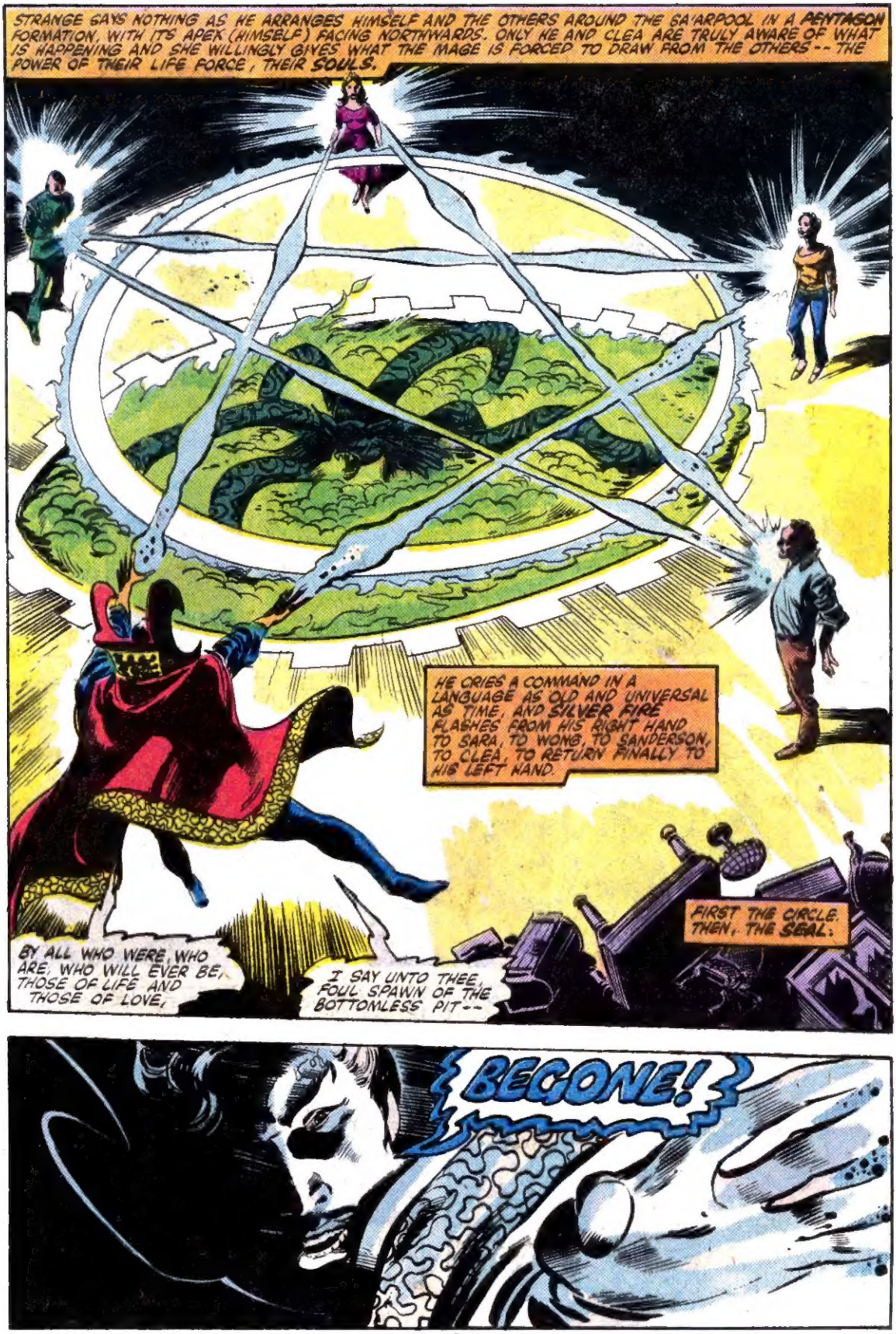
UPSTAIRS, JACK STARRETT HAS DISCOVERED DR. STRANGE'S ATTIC STUDY.
DESPITE HIMSELF, HE'S IMPRESSED.
HECKUVA PLACE. IT'S WEIRD. I'VE A FEELING IT'S A LOT BIGGER ON THE INSIDE THAN IT LOOKS ON THE OUTSIDE.
WISH I HAD A CAMERA. I WONDER WHAT'S IN HERE...?
HOLY--!
PEEP!
STEPHEN-- THE PIT!
MOVE AWAY FROM THERE, CLEA --AT ONCE!
OUT OF THE FIRE RISE THREE ...THINGS -- ONCE HUMAN BEINGS, NOW AS FAR REMOVED FROM THAT HUMANITY AS A BODY CAN BE. THEIR SOULS -- ALL FREE WILL -- ARE GONE.
THE SHELLS THAT REMAIN SERVE ONLY THE N'GARAI.
THERE IS YOUR FOE, MY CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT. THE WOMAN, CLEA -- ONCE YOU HAVE BROUGHT HER TO ME -- WILL JOIN YOU AS MY ETERNAL SLAVE.
BUT DR. STRANGE MUST DIE!
THEY MAY NOT BE UNDEAD, BUT MERELY POSSESSED.
I DARE NOT USE DEADLY FORCE AGAINST THEM UNTIL I KNOW FOR CERTAIN.
I'LL BIND THEM WITH THE CRIMSON BANDS OF CYTTORAK!
NO! THEIR ARMOR -- REFLECTING MY SPELL!
CURSE ME FOR A NOVICE! THE DEMON ANTICIPATED MY ATTACK!
NOW, I'M THE ONE BOUND IN MYSTIC CHAINS!

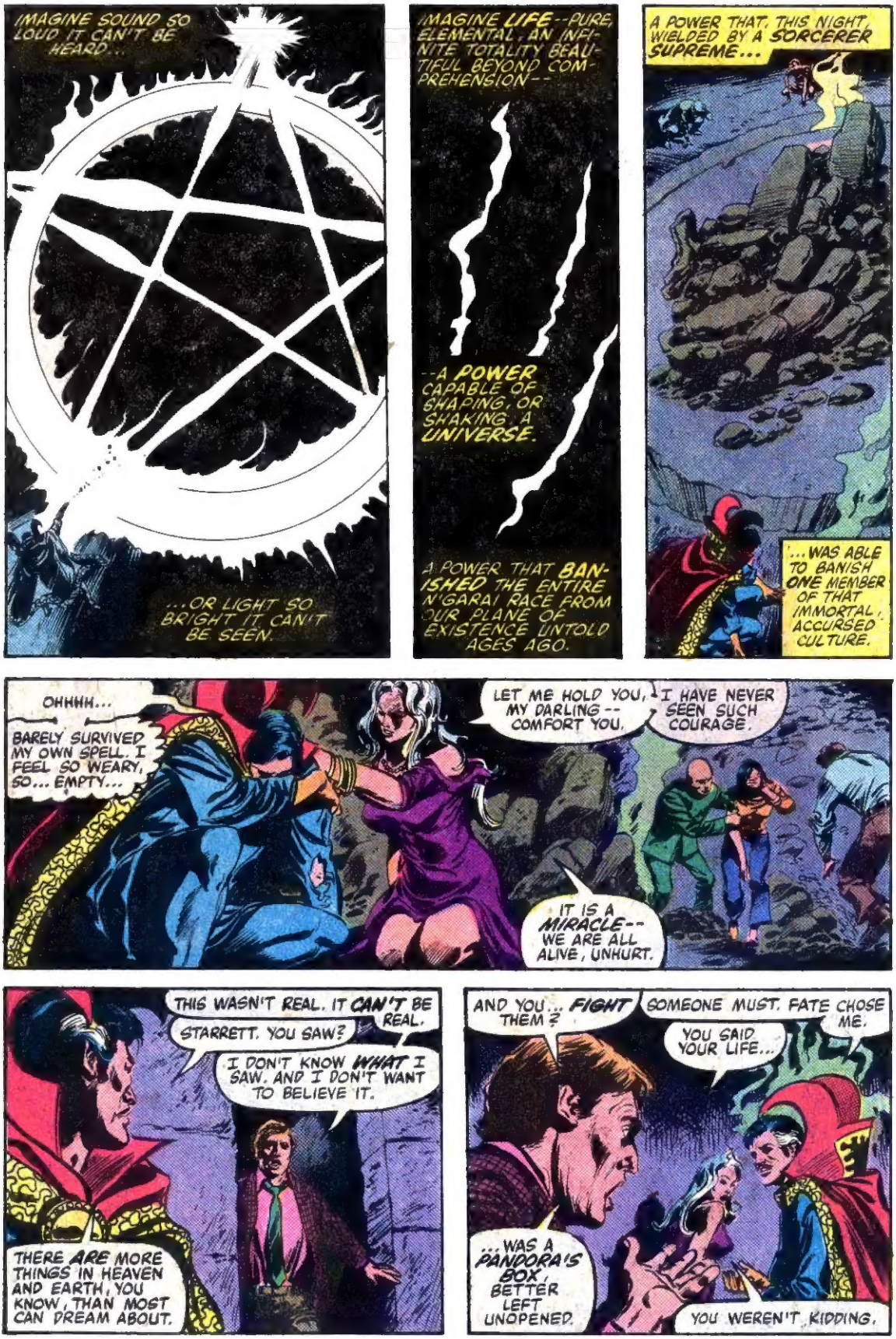
FORTUNATELY, I KNOW THE COUNTER-SPELL.
BUT, IN THE SECONDS IT TAKES THE MAGE TO ACT, THE N'GARAI DEMON STRIKES!
MY-- LEG!!
NEVER... FELT SUCH COLD--
STEPHEN!
--NUMBING BODY... SOUL...
TOO LITTLE STRENGTH-- SPELLS TOO... FEEBLE. I'M NOT AFFECTING THE DEMON.
THE DEMON HAD A DEFENSE FOR THE FANGS OF FARALLAH, SO I'D BEST TRY A PHYSICAL ATTACK, INSTEAD OF A MYSTIC ONE.
ONE SPELL TO ENTRAP WONG, SARA AND THEIR COMPANION WITHIN THE CHAINS OF KRAKKAN.
ANOTHER TO SUMMON THE SWORD WONG CARRIES.
I MAY NOT BE THE SORCERESS I ONCE WAS--
--THE DISCIPLE I DREAMED OF BECOMING--
--BUT, EVEN SO, DEMON, I AM FAR FROM HELPLESS!
THAT WAS A NEAR THING, CLEA. I AM GRATEFUL. NOW, HOLD TIGHT WHILE MY CLOAK OF LEVITATION CARRIES US BEYOND THE DEMON'S REACH.
ARE WE RUNNING AWAY, STEPHEN? GIVING UP?!

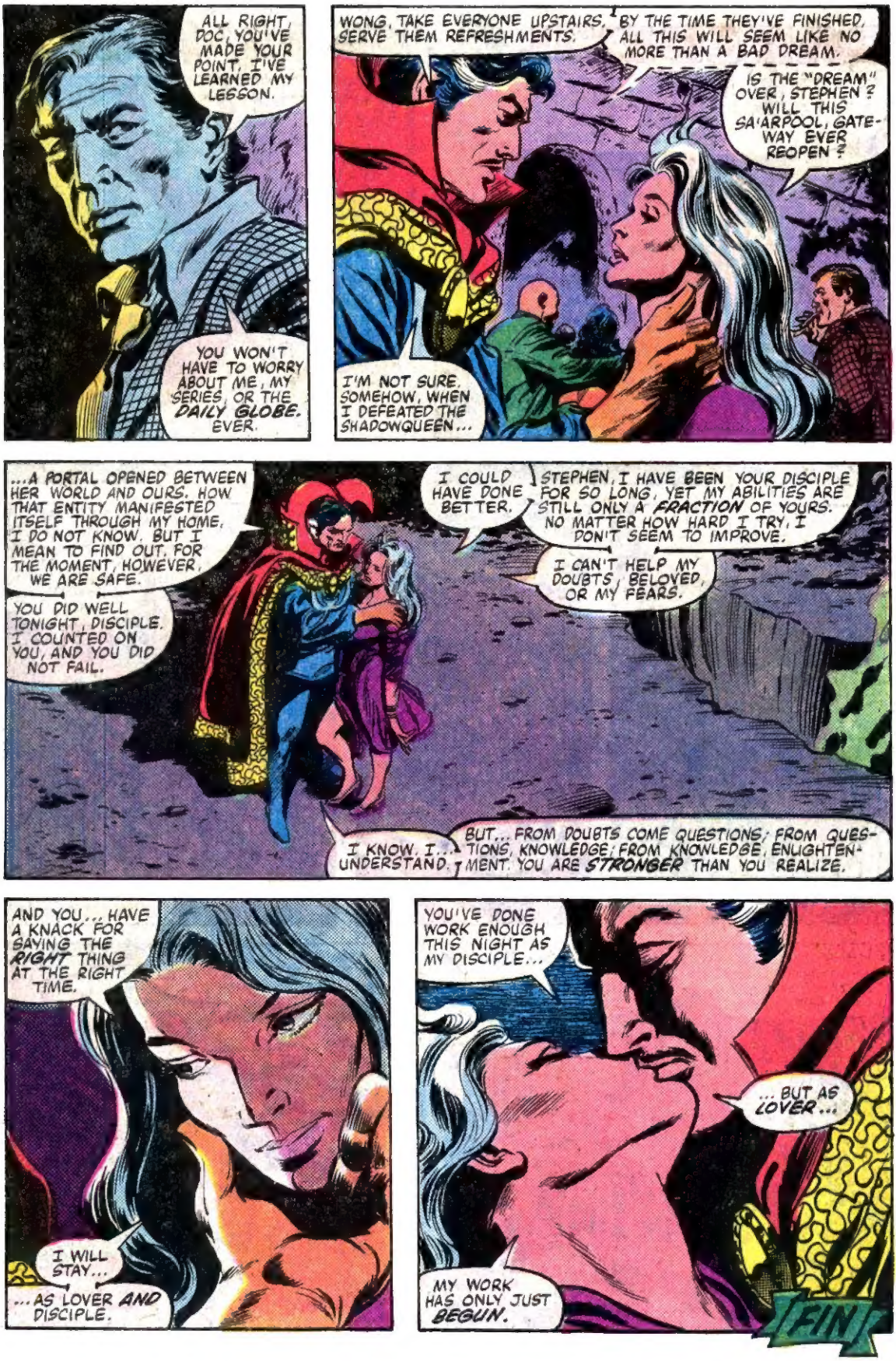

NO, TO BOTH QUESTIONS -- MERELY GAINING SOME BREATHING SPACE...
TIME TO THINK AND PLAN. WE'VE PRECIOUS LITTLE OF EITHER. THE DEMON'S SLAVES ARE ALREADY FREE
THERE IS A SPELL TO SEAL THIS SA'ARPOOL. BUT IT IS ANCIENT AND VERY OBSCURE. I'M NOT COMPLETELY SURE OF HOW IT GOES, AND FOR IT TO BE EFFECTIVE, I MUST BE ABSOLUTELY PERFECT.
IT IS IN THE BOOK OF THE VISHANTI IN MY STUDY. I CAN MOST QUICKLY REACH THERE IN MY ASTRAL FORM -- BUT WHILE MY SPIRIT IS GONE, MY BODY WILL BE HELPLESS.
I MUST DEPEND ON YOU TO PROTECT IT, CLEA. CAN YOU DO THAT?
YES.
GOOD.
IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, THE SORCERER'S EPHEMERAL ASTRAL FORM...
...RISES UP THROUGH THE HOUSE, FROM CELLAR TO ATTIC, WHERE -- NOT ALTOGETHER TO HIS SURPRISE -- DR. STRANGE FINDS...
JACK STARRETT! I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN HE'D IGNORE MY COMMAND.
YOUR LIFE, YOUR SOUL, ARE IN MY HANDS BELOVED.
I WILL NOT FAIL YOU.
TH-THAT BOOK! IT OPENED BY ITSELF!
THE BOOK OF THE VISHANTI, EVERY SPELL AND COUNTER-SPELL KNOWN TO MY MENTOR, THE ANCIENT ONE, IS LISTED HEREIN.

AS HE SEARCHES HIS MOST ANCIENT, MOST LEARNED--MOST VALUABLE-- TOME, STRANGE STRUGGLES NOT TO THINK OF CLEA, FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE, AND HERS, FAR BELOW.
IN THE BASEMENT, ELDRITCH ENERGIES LIGHT THE STYGIAN DARKNESS AS CLEA IS FORCED--SLOWLY, BUT INEXORABLY--TO GIVE GROUND. SHE HAS FOUGHT WELL, BUT NOW BOTH SHE AND THE N'GARAI DEMON KNOW SHE CANNOT LAST MUCH LONGER.
SHE DOES NOT HAVE TO.
FOUND IT! NOT ONLY THE SA'ARPOOL SPELL--
--BUT ONE THAT WILL DEAL WITH THE DEMON'S SLAVES AS WELL.
WITH A MENTAL COMMAND, THE MAGE SUMMONS A SILVER DAGGER FROM ITS CRADLE ON THE MANTLEPIECE.
YOW!
THAT CRYSTAL BALL--
--I KNOCKED IT OVER!
STARRETT, YOU ARE RAPIDLY BECOMING...
...AN INTOLERABLE NUISANCE.
THE BALL...FLEW BACK ONTO ITS TABLE BY ITSELF! NOW THAT CRAZY KNIFE IS CHASIN' ME DOWN THE STAIRS!
I'M GETTIN' OUTTA HERE!
MY SPELL OF TRANSPORTATION WILL RUSH THE DAGGER DOWN THROUGH THE HALLS AND STAIRWAYS.
IN MY GHOST-FORM, I CAN USE A MORE DIRECT ROUTE.

FOOL! YOU PROTECTED YOURSELF FROM OUR DREAD EN-CHANTMENTS--
--BUT LEFT YOURSELF WIDE OPEN TO A PURELY PHYSICAL ATTACK!
=UNNNGNH!=
JUST IN TIME!
TRUE, "SARA"!
BUT CLEA IS NOT THE ONLY ONE HERE!..
...VULNERABLE TO SUCH TACTICS!
A THRUST TO THE HEART--CERTAIN DEATH...
...NOT FOR SARA; BUT FOR THE DEMON WHO POSSESSED HER!
THUS DO I FREE HER SOUL WHILE LEAVING HER BODY UNHARMED!
HOW IRONIC THAT THIS WEAPON...
...ONCE USED TO TAKE MY LIFE...*
...SHOULD TONIGHT BE USED TO SAVE OTHERS.
*SEE DOC #15 1-5 --JO.
THESE WERE MERELY THE PRELIMINARIES, HOWEVER.
NOW COMES THE TRUE TEST.
I WILL RESIST, STRANGE! YOU ARE TIRED, WEAK--HUMAN! I AM N'GARAI!
IN THE END, I WILL PREVAIL!


STRANGE SAYS NOTHING AS HE ARRANGES HIMSELF AND THE OTHERS AROUND THE SA'ARPOOL IN A PENTAGON FORMATION, WITH ITS APEX (HIMSELF) FACING NORTHWARDS. ONLY HE AND CLEA ARE TRULY AWARE OF WHAT IS HAPPENING AND SHE WILLINGLY GIVES WHAT THE MAGE IS FORCED TO DRAW FROM THE OTHERS -- THE POWER OF THEIR LIFE FORCE, THEIR SOULS.
HE CRIES A COMMAND IN A LANGUAGE AS OLD AND UNIVERSAL AS TIME, AND SILVER FIRE FLASHES FROM HIS RIGHT HAND TO SARA, TO WONG, TO SANDERSON, TO CLEA, TO RETURN FINALLY TO HIS LEFT HAND.
FIRST THE CIRCLE. THEN, THE SEAL:
BY ALL WHO WERE, WHO ARE, WHO WILL EVER BE, THOSE OF LIFE AND THOSE OF LOVE,
I SAY UNTO THEE, FOUL SPAWN OF THE BOTTOMLESS PIT --
BEGONE!


IMAGINE SOUND SO LOUD IT CAN'T BE HEARD...
...OR LIGHT SO BRIGHT IT CAN'T BE SEEN.
IMAGINE LIFE--PURE, ELEMENTAL, AN INFINITE TOTALITY BEAUTIFUL BEYOND COMPREHENSION--
--A POWER CAPABLE OF SHAPING, OR SHAKING A UNIVERSE.
A POWER THAT BANISHED THE ENTIRE N'GARAI RACE FROM OUR PLANE OF EXISTENCE UNTOLD AGES AGO.
A POWER THAT, THIS NIGHT, WIELDED BY A SORCERER SUPREME...
...WAS ABLE TO BANISH ONE MEMBER OF THAT IMMORTAL, ACCURSED CULTURE.
OHHHH...
BARELY SURVIVED MY OWN SPELL. I FEEL SO WEARY, SO... EMPTY...
LET ME HOLD YOU, MY DARLING -- COMFORT YOU.
I HAVE NEVER SEEN SUCH COURAGE.
IT IS A MIRACLE-- WE ARE ALL ALIVE, UNHURT.
THIS WASN'T REAL. IT CAN'T BE REAL.
STARRETT. YOU SAW?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT I SAW. AND I DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE IT.
THERE ARE MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH, YOU KNOW, THAN MOST CAN DREAM ABOUT.
AND YOU... FIGHT THEM?
SOMEONE MUST. FATE CHOSE ME.
YOU SAID YOUR LIFE...
...WAS A PANDORA'S BOX, BETTER LEFT UNOPENED.
YOU WEREN'T KIDDING.


ALL RIGHT, DOC, YOU'VE MADE YOUR POINT. I'VE LEARNED MY LESSON.
YOU WON'T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT ME, MY SERIES, OR THE DAILY GLOBE. EVER.
WONG, TAKE EVERYONE UPSTAIRS, SERVE THEM REFRESHMENTS.
BY THE TIME THEY'VE FINISHED, ALL THIS WILL SEEM LIKE NO MORE THAN A BAD DREAM.
IS THE "DREAM" OVER, STEPHEN? WILL THIS SA'ARPOOL GATEWAY EVER REOPEN?
I'M NOT SURE. SOMEHOW, WHEN I DEFEATED THE SHADOWQUEEN...
...A PORTAL OPENED BETWEEN HER WORLD AND OURS. HOW THAT ENTITY MANIFESTED ITSELF THROUGH MY HOME, I DO NOT KNOW. BUT I MEAN TO FIND OUT. FOR THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, WE ARE SAFE.
YOU DID WELL TONIGHT, DISCIPLE. I COUNTED ON YOU, AND YOU DID NOT FAIL.
I COULD HAVE DONE BETTER.
STEPHEN, I HAVE BEEN YOUR DISCIPLE FOR SO LONG, YET MY ABILITIES ARE STILL ONLY A FRACTION OF YOURS. NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRY, I DON'T SEEM TO IMPROVE.
I CAN'T HELP MY DOUBTS, BELOVED, OR MY FEARS.
I KNOW. I... UNDERSTAND.
BUT... FROM DOUBTS COME QUESTIONS; FROM QUESTIONS, KNOWLEDGE; FROM KNOWLEDGE, ENLIGHTENMENT. YOU ARE STRONGER THAN YOU REALIZE.
AND YOU... HAVE A KNACK FOR SAYING THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT TIME.
I WILL STAY...
...AS LOVER AND DISCIPLE.
YOU'VE DONE WORK ENOUGH THIS NIGHT AS MY DISCIPLE...
...BUT AS LOVER...
MY WORK HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN.
FIN